

At 6 o'clock in the morning on the 31st of August, a commutator of the suburban town of Roxley High-lands, rushing for his train with his necktie in one hand and a wedge of pie in the other, heard a moan by the roadside, and rolling a hurried eye in that direction, saw what at first he took to be a bundle of rags in the bushes. A second glance showed that it was a woman. The next instant the still air rang with his excited shouts:

"Maida Hackett! Help! Help! It's Maida—Maida Hackett!"

At once it seemed as if the hither-to deserted road became alive with hurrying people, all converging toward the spot, exclaiming to each other excitedly: "Maida Hackett! Have they found her? Did they catch the kidnappers? Where was she? Who'll get the reward?"

The commutator who had made the discovery, of course, all thought of his train in the fever of the moment, and raised the head to his knee as he partly knelt on the ground. The face that he remembered so well in its freshness and beauty, was pale, worn and grained with dirt; the hair had been flashing black and handsome, now seemed and soiled like a charwoman's; the graceful body, always so richly and stylishly attired, was covered with rags indescribably filthy; and from it arose a peculiar, nauseating odor that compelled the commutator, even in his excitement, to turn his head aside for fresh air.

"Heavens and earth! What has happened to her? Has somebody been in the fast gathering crowd around her?"

"Get a doctor!" said the commutator in an awe-stricken voice. "A carriage too, somebody. Quick! She is suffering—must take her home."

A stout man, evidently a stranger, stretched his neck for a sight of the attraction.

"What's the trouble?" he asked a neighbor.

"It's Maida Hackett; they've found her," he answered under his breath.

"Was she lost—here? What say?" the stranger inquired, sticking his head this way and that for better views over the heads and shoulders in front of him.

"Kindness—ten days ago—the 31st of August, just as she came out of the postoffice. Queerest thing that ever—"

He stopped as a carriage pulled up beside them and the girl was lifted into it and driven away. Then he looked at the stout man as if expecting some comment, but that gentleman started rapidly after the rolling carriage, and in a few minutes was hurrying up the garden walk to the front door of the Hackett place.

The bearers were at the moment carrying the unconscious girl into the hall, and he entered with them, a serving maid stood weeping on the piazza, and Mr. Hackett, in slippers and shirt-sleeves, wild with excitement, was giving orders so confused that nobody could make them out.

The stout man, as one accustomed to meeting emergencies, took the inert form in his arms, starting up the stairs.

"Show me her chamber," he said over his shoulder to Mr. Hackett, adding in a whisper to the man who sent for, from headquarters—Sherman. "Where's her room?" and then louder: "Send for the family doctor. But do not worry. She's all right—only doped with opium, that's all."

"Only?" whispered one of the bearers to another, glancing after the stout man, who immediately pursued the way the distracted father pointed out.

The crowd that had gathered around the house hoping to learn the facts of the strange case was disappointed, for it was more than twenty-four hours before the doctor pronounced the victim well enough to relate her story, which was as follows:

As she left the postoffice on that memorable evening she was approached by a woman in a faded shawl, elderly and pathetic in appearance, who told her that there was a family in extreme distress over at the "Corners," and the doctor had sent her, a neighbor, to ask Miss Hackett (who was known as a philanthropist) if she couldn't do something for them—send a little to eat, at any rate. She immediately promised to assist them and proposed going to the grocery store for some food which the woman might take to them, but the latter said that they were just putting up the shutters at the store as she came by. There was a small place near the "Corners," she said, where groceries were sold, and they could get what they wanted there.

Miss Hackett accompanied the woman who, saying it was much the nearer way, went across lots to the railroad tracks, which was the reason why nobody had seen them, and followed it some distance. Night had come on and Miss Hackett had only a vague idea of where they were when her conductor turned up a lane which led to the main road. This they crossed, entered another lane, and very soon reached a store-like building, which sat in a yard surrounded by huge trees. It looked

deserted. Shutters were over all the windows, the steps were rotted and falling, the roof of the porch had fallen and was hanging as if likely to drop away completely at any moment, and the front door, painted white, in strange contrast to the remainder of the house, which was wood color, never having been painted at all, was attached to the frame by leather hinges, and full of pits, entered with her companion, when a voice called "Come in."

She found herself at once in the kitchen, there being no hall, and there sat two men and two women, all smoking and drinking. Frightened, Miss Hackett started to withdraw, but one of the men, a dark, pock-marked, evil-eyed, dirty fellow of about 50, jumped up and stood before the door, preventing her. The woman who led her to the place had disappeared. The second man, who was young and brutal appearing, with red hair, tricky eyes, and a huge hairy wart on the side of his nose, asked her what she meant by breaking in on respectable people like that, and at the same time snatching her handbag, which contained a large roll of banknotes. These he counted and divided with the other man, whom he addressed as "Pop." The women demurred at this division of the spoil, when the youth suggested that they take their share out of the young lady's clothes and jewels. Then they had all fallen upon her, pushed and carried her to an upstairs room, where the women stripped her of her jewels and outer clothing, and then left her alone after locking the door behind them.

By the dim light of the smoking lamp they had placed on a chair she saw that the room was almost bare of furniture, and that the one window was barred with iron. In a corner sagged a ragged, filthy bed, a broken pitcher lay on a rickety stand, the slanting rough floor had no carpet, the walls were frowzy with torn and soiled cheap paper, a piece of cracked looking-glass was tacked in the corner near the barred window, and on one side yawned an evil-smelling fireplace choked with ashes, soot, old cans, bottles, rags and paper. The air was close, vile. At first she could scarcely breathe in it. In these miserable quarters she was kept until she lost count of the days. It was often so cold in the night, and she grew so weary and hopeless, that she finally overcame her repugnance to the filth of the bed sufficiently to lie down on it, covering herself with the rags. She found an old skirt and jacket in the fireplace, too, and these she felt compelled to put on.

All this time of her detention not a word had been said to her by any member of the household. She frequently heard loud voices and sounds of ribald celebration downstairs, doors opening and shutting, the clatter of dishes, screams and laughter, incoherent singing, and other indications of a too free and easy life. Once a day the darker man left her a plate of food of some kind and a pewter dipper of water. Always she had spoken to him, asking what was wanted of her, offering large sums of money for her liberty. But she never had received any answer. Her jailer was as dumb as the circumstances were peculiar. Then finally one evening seeing that the door had not been closed after the food was brought in, she stole out, ran past the kitchen in which the occupants were carousing, and tried to find her way home. But there was a strange confusion in her mind, her head swam, she felt hysterical, and she did not know which way to turn. She heard the door had put some kind of drug in the food they had given her. She was weak in body, distracted in mind, having no sense of direction, and would not inquire of anybody for fear of recognition, on the one side, and, on the other, pursuit. So she had walked and stumbled and ran on through the night until exhausted. Then she had lost consciousness, knowing no more until she awoke in her own chamber.

Only Mr. Hackett, the family physician, a maid and the stout detective were present at the telling of the tale, and before it was finished the latter was ready to proceed to the scene of the crime, which was recognized at once by all present as an old tumble-down ell of a farmhouse, long disused, which in the times of a few years back had been notorious as a low house of entertainment. The detective went over thoroughly with Miss Hackett the descriptions of the jailers, and then calling at the police station took two men with him and drove to the place described.

Here the first of what proved to be a startling series of surprises was lying in wait for him. The house was in the possession of a man and wife who were, to use his own words, "so simple that respectability stuck out all over them." They said they had been living there six weeks and never had seen any young lady during that time. They recognized the descriptions of the people, wanted, however, as those of the family who had lived there before them, a man and wife and son and step-

daughter; but these were now in Canada, 400 miles away, and had been for a long time—months, they were sure. The detective asked to see the prison room which, according to Miss Hackett's memory of the place, must be the back chamber at the left of the hall. There he found the bare slanting floor, the cheap frowzy paper, the broken pitcher on the stand, the one chair and the filthy bed sagging in the corner. But there was no fireplace, and it was self-evident that there never had been any bars at the windows, of which there were two instead of only one. Besides, the stairs from the hall did not lead past the kitchen, for that was in the rear, and the only stairs in the building were those which ran directly up from the front door.

police. Eighteen different persons offered to take their oaths that this family, whose name was Grove, all of them sellers of clothespoles cut in the woods—when they did anything—had been in the town of Molyneux, Canada, on the 31st day of August, 400 miles from Roxley, and some were sure they had been there for weeks, remaining until lured over the border into the state and arrested. One man had traded a cheap horse with the son the 30th of August, being sure of the date because it was the same day on which his own father died. A woman had bought poles of the father on the 31st. Indeed, six different persons had traded with some member of the Grove family, in Canada, on that day, and could fix the date positively.

testimony to your skill that can't be disputed. The case is already famous, and if you can succeed in disentangling the snarl nobody would ever again doubt your ability to compel the person you look at to tell the truth. Will you do it?"

Dr. Furnivall smiled indulgently. Whether or not his power was doubted did not greatly afflict him. But there was interest in his manner as he leaned forward in his chair and regarded the young lawyer through his colored glasses.

"You are a lawyer," he said, "and the name of Sir John Paget should be familiar to you. Doesn't this case remind you of something?"

The lawyer sat a moment thinking.

had known her as a vagrant as far off as he could see her, but never had met her face to face and looked keenly at her. He arrested some poor stray who was too muddled to give any name, and to save trouble for himself in looking her up, or perhaps because he really thought she was the Grove woman, he himself gave the name to the desk clerk, according to what he knew of one way or another. She could be released in the morning and nothing more would be heard of her. If the family really were absent at the time that was the most rational explanation of the accident according to what we know of police probabilities—you as a lawyer and I as a penologist. That it might be so is reason enough why we should not consider the evidence of the blotter conclusive, as a layman, to his confusion, would unhesitatingly do. What we find accords with what we know. We must carry the truth with us in order to find it at the end of the journey.

Then you will interview these witnesses—"

"I will read the list of names that," the doctor interrupted. "I always had a theory that Canning mystery, and am interested in this case because I wish to test the theory. The answer to the one conundrum will prove to be the same as I have given you, to that or I am woefully mistaken."

The lawyer arose much gratified. "Here is a list of the witnesses, with their addresses, who declare against the family," he said, producing a slip of paper and laying it together with his card, on the desk. "Will you notify me, so that I may be present when you examine them?"

"When I examine them you shall be there."

If there was a dry intonation of the doctor's voice the lawyer did not notice it, for he was already hurrying out at the door, pursuing the general plan of young professional men who, having nothing to do, seize every opportunity to convey the impression that they are rushed with business.

But before he could wholly disappear Dr. Furnivall called him back.

"Wait a moment," he said. Writing a few sentences on a sheet of paper he sealed it within an envelope and handed it to the lawyer. "There is only one solution of this problem," he continued, "and it is given here. It is also the solution of the famous Elizabeth Canning problem. Do not read it until tomorrow noon."

"That will keep you from the way the necessary length of time," he concluded to himself.

At 11 o'clock the next morning Dr. Furnivall was being introduced to Mr. Hackett by that gentleman's family physician, Dr. Crosby.

"I have brought Dr. Furnivall to see your daughter, Mr. Hackett," he said. "How does she seem today?"

"Why, the same as usual, I think," Mr. Hackett answered, somewhat startled, looking quickly at the two doctors. "She is nearly all right, as long as the forbidden subject is not mentioned—somewhat downhearted and nervous—that seems to be all. Have you any reason to fear complications—"

"or any anything serious?"

"I am sure she has some burden on her mind, and I look to Dr. Furnivall to relieve her of it," Dr. Crosby answered.

"Burden?" Mr. Hackett questioned, quickly, anxiously regarding him.

"Yes, there are some omissions and inconsistencies in her testimony relating to that affair which indicate a peculiar state of mind, a state that we must learn in order to bring back her full strength and health. Dr. Furnivall has had such a wide and thorough experience in such cases that I should expect much from his seeing her."

"Oh," Mr. Hackett hastened to say, "I have all confidence in you, Dr. Crosby, and can trust your advice. It can do no harm, of course."

He glanced with curiosity at Dr. Furnivall, who volunteered a trifle brusquely:

"It will cure her."

The doctor, when they entered the room, was lying on a couch reading. She appeared listless and weak. There was neither color in the naturally beautiful face nor sparkle in the black eyes. She greeted her visitors with forced brightness, saying to Dr. Furnivall as she gave him her hand:

"You are a stranger in Roxley, aren't you, Dr. Furnivall? We all of us know each other here, you see, and as strength is always such a great matter of interest and speculation to us. So provincial, isn't it?"

The doctor, who was wearing his thick colored spectacles, removed them, looking into her eyes as he answered:

"Yes, you might call me a stranger here, though I have often ridden through the town in my motor. A charming little place—just the right distance from the city, too, for a business man's residence. And so quiet! It is remarkable that in a romantic adventure as yours could happen. When did you first see the man Groves?"

Mr. Hackett made a hurried movement of warning as the speaker's words began to take the forbidden direction, but Dr. Crosby touched his arm, giving him a reassuring shake of the head.

"He knows what he's about," he whispered. "Don't interrupt. It's for her good."

The young lady's eyes were in Dr. Furnivall's as he spoke, and gradually as he went on her mobile face passed through a strange variety of expressions—irresolvence, excitement, perplexity, earnestness, peacefulness, and finally, as he finished, settled into deep introspection. And she answered at once in a mechanical voice wholly devoid of inflection, like the deaf mutes we have been taught to imitate speech:

"The first time I saw him? It was in this room, when he was brought to me for identification."

Mr. Hackett started forward with an exclamation, but Dr. Crosby again reassured him with a look and a whispered word.

"Listen," he said. "Don't make a movement. Much depends on her being able to concentrate her thoughts. Don't distract her mind."

Dr. Furnivall went on:

"How were you able to describe him and his family, and even his former home, so truthfully, never having seen either of them or it?"

"Why," she answered, readily. "I had seen a description of the family and their resort in the newspapers long ago, when it was raided by the police. The details, or some of them, impressed themselves on my mind. It was all so frightful, so vile. I could not forget it."

"Yes, but why did you accuse them of abducting you?"

"I was compelled to have some excuse for my absence. And I thought that to accuse them would do no harm, they were so far away—for I knew

they were in Canada. I was very much alarmed, and very remorseful, when I found that they were arrested. I did not know what to do, for I was resolved that they should not suffer on my account. Yet I could not confess to my stern father—he would annihilate me. It is the horror of this position that has made me sick."

"You would not confess? Confess what? Tell me the real story of your absence."

"I do—not—think—I—can," she answered, slowly. "That is, I don't know why I did it. I know only that I often have felt as if I should like to run away, as boys sometimes do, and enjoy life out in the world, free from social amenities and restraints. I have always been required to seem so prim and respectable! Often it seemed as if I should fly—it was all so deadly tawny. My father was so allotted me to associate with the young people of Roxley. He says they have the breeding and manners of barbarians. I have been alone and very unhappy all my life since my mother died, and that evening as I left the postoffice, an automobile came along with a merry party in it, one of whom was Lillian Farness, an old schoolmate of mine, now an actress. And somehow I found myself in the car with them rushing toward the city. They were very jolly, and enjoying it immensely. I forgot my duty. It seemed as if I had suddenly been cast back into some past period of my existence and was in the midst of company whose manners were perfectly familiar to me. The life I had lived in Roxley was so present in my thought only as a bad dream. How had I ever endured it! After we arrived in the city I lived with Lillian, and we had the most delightful times, cooking our own food in our room, going about without chaplains everywhere. Oh, it was heavenly after my dreary imprisonment in my father's house! But Lillian obtained an engagement which took her away, and without her I began to feel homesick and sorry for the story I had taken. I dared not return to my father, and I could only stay where I was. But very soon my money and jewelry were gone, and the lodging mistress, who regarded my escapade as a great joke, helped me to make up a story to tell, gave me some frightful old clothes in place of my own, made me take some kind of a drug to give all possible color to the story, rubbed soot and dirt over my face and hands, and just before daylight in the morning had me taken into an inn at Roxley, and laid beside the road, where I must be seen and carried home by those who go on the early train."

This astonishing confession had proceeded despite Mr. Hackett, who had done his best to reach Dr. Furnivall, and it seemed, throttle him. Dr. Crosby throwing his arms around him and putting forth all his strength, managed to hold him until the end. As the girl finished, Dr. Furnivall turned to his apologetic father, saying with professional calm:

"This is a case of atavism, as I supposed. A progenitor of yours, Mr. Hackett, was a rake in his youth, as you are aware, and very naturally a strain of his devilry has filtered down into his descendant. It is a disease, a disease which your pigheadedness would have driven, in anybody but a girl as fine as yours, into something fatal morally. Now that she knows that you have heard the true story of her escapade she will talk freely with you about it, if you will treat the matter broad-mindedly, and the talk will do both you and her a world of good. Take Dr. Crosby's advice in the case. Give him his head, and he will prevent anything of the kind from occurring again."

At that moment the young lawyer was reading with avidity the letter which Dr. Furnivall had given him the day before. It ran:

"The charge against your client, Grove, will be withdrawn tomorrow and he and his family will be sent back to Canada well satisfied. Miss Hackett will enter a sanitarium for a short course of treatment. If you have the eyes you may read between these lines the solution of the Hackett mystery. It is all the answer you will ever receive either to this or to that other, that famous mystery known in law and medicine as 'The Elizabeth Canning Case.'"

(Next week: "The Coincident Man.")



"SHOW ME HER CHAMBER."